Update on Cuba's Medical Mission in Trinidad and Tobago
February 2025

Excerpts from
"Forced/compelled labor (trafficking in persons) by the Cuban state: Information for the 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State," Free Society Project/Cuba Archive, February 2025

Excerpts from "Update on selected countries' medical brigades": Trinidad and Tobago

The 2024 US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP report) classified Trinidad and Tobago as a Tier 2 country whose government "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so." Yet, the country page acknowledges: "The government reported it signed a technical cooperation agreement with the Government of Cuba in 2018 to guide the recruitment and employment of Cuban medical workers in the country. The government reported that under the agreement, it directly interviewed and chose the workers, provided employment on a contractual basis under terms and conditions of the chief personnel officer; paid salaries commensurate with those of Trinbagonian counterparts directly into the medical professionals' own local bank accounts; and granted the employees vacation time, sick leave, paid local and Cuban holidays, overtime, housing, transportation, and meals.[1] This appears to have been accepted face value and would certainly prove untrue. The TIP report also states: "According to press reports, in 2023 there were 78 government-affiliated Cuban medical professionals in the country who may have been forced to work by the Cuban government." Its Prioritized Recommendations were silent on the matter.

In fact, since 2003 Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba have had a "Compensated Technical Assistance Programme"; by 2015, 200 Cuban health workers had already served in Trinidad and Tobago.[2] Cuba's presence has seemingly grown since then, as in August 2024, the medical brigade had a staff of 116 collaborators made up of a doctor, oncologists, maxillofacial specialists, and nursing staff, with 15 more doctors expected soon.[3]

Although the amount paid by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago per collaborator is unknown, $3,000 a month per worker would total $4.7 million a year and $4,000 per month would total $6.3 million a year. Thus, the Cuban medical brigade was easily funded with equivalent US government assistance of $5.2 million in fiscal year 2023 that included $1.3 million for the health sector (HIV/AIDS).[4] Additional costs to the US taxpayer may also be implied in the numerous projects reported by the US Department of

[1] https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/trinidad-and-tobago/

[2] "Cuba's Lucrative Medical Aid Programme," *Global Voices*, Sep. 16, 2015, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/cubas-lucrative-medical-aid-programme

[3] Ricardo R. González, "Corazones villaclareños en Trinidad y Tobago," *Vanguardia*, Aug. 19, 2024.

[4] https://www.foreignassistance.gov/cd/trinidad%20and%20tobago/

State by which the US government provides technical assistance to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.[5]

In December 2022, USAID opened a satellite office there, so the Government of Trinidad Tobago must have expected to continue facing no consequences for exploiting Cuban workers in its territory, as in January 2025, it the extended the health cooperation agreement with Cuba for five years.[6]

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[5] "US Relations With Trinidad and Tobago: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet," Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, US Department of State, Aug. 18, 2023; https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-trinidad-and-tobago/

[6] "Realiza Brigada Médica en Trinidad Tobago, Balance de su trabajo anual," Minrex, Puerto España, Jan. 25, 2025.